

Letter 4



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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
BATTLE MOUNTAIN FIELD OFFICE

April 30, 2001

Gerald Smith
District Manager
Battle Mountain Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
50 Bastian Road
Battle Mountain, NV 89820

RE: SAI # E2001-112, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Phoenix Project, Newmont Gold Company, Lander County, Nevada - BLM

Dear Mr. Smith:

- 4-1 We appreciate the opportunity to review and provide comments on the subject document. On page 2-24, in Section 2.4.2, Waste Rock Facilities, the fourth paragraph describes Battle Mountain Gold's proposal to mitigate the potential impacts of backfilling the pits on ground water by amending the waste with lime as it is placed in the pits. The text goes on to describe the design for the waste dumps which includes an Evaporative/Transpiration Cover for the waste dumps to control water flux through the dumps. Both of these design features are well conceived and will provide better long term benefit to the wildlife resources in the Battle Mountains.
- 4-2 On page 2-30, in Section 2.4.10, Neutralization, the document discusses the neutralization circuit design for the tailings facility. We were curious if Newmont evaluated the option of mixing the tailings with heap leach ore for placement on the heap leach pad? This technology has been demonstrated to be very effective at a different operation in Nevada.
- 4-3 On page 2-32, in Section 2.4.14, Heap Leach Beneficiation Facilities, the first paragraph discusses the wildlife protective measures to be utilized at the heap leach facility. We would like to suggest Newmont consider enclosing the carbon plant inside a building. This would vastly reduce the threat of exposure to open cyanide that exists at the present site. The netting structure presently covering the carbon plants does not afford the same level of durability and protection found in a building.
- 4-4 On page 2-38, in Section 2.4.21.2, Reclamation Goals, the document discusses long-term reclamation goals that include inhibiting environmental degradation, protecting surface and groundwater resources and reestablishment of a vegetative cover on the mine disturbances. Throughout the document one of the post mine land uses is described as livestock grazing. We are unsure if livestock grazing will be a suitable postmine land use at this site. Because the vegetation is so vital to the long-term protection of the ground and surface water resources, we do not believe

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- 4-1 Comment noted.
- 4-2 BMG considered mixing tailings with heap leach ore for placement on the heap leach pad. It was determined that this would reduce precious metals recovery because the finer grained tailings material would decrease the permeability of the heap leach material. Also, the amount of tailings that would be generated by the project is far more than the heap leach pad could hold; consequently, additional tailings facilities would still need to be constructed. For these reasons, this approach was not further evaluated.
- 4-3 Section 2.4.14 of the EIS states, "All facilities presenting open solution surfaces, such as the event pond and the solution staging tanks, would be covered with bird netting or other suitable measures to protect migratory birds." This does not preclude enclosing the carbon process area (staging tanks) with a building structure; however, given the size of such a building and the effectiveness of the current netting cover, the additional cost is not warranted.
- 4-4 Mitigation measure S-2 (Grazing Management Plan) is designed to address long-term management for protection of the ground cover. One of the principal reasons for this measure is to maximize the potential for successful long-term waste rock cap integrity.

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4-4 that grazing would allow long-term resource goals to be met. We are unsure whether livestock management in the Battle Mountains can provide suitable protection for the vegetative resources within the project area. Current management, particularly on riparian habitat, in the Copper Canyon allotment continues to foster degraded conditions. If the soil covers are essential to protect the groundwater and surface water resources of the project area, it is appropriate to provide greater protection to these areas. This would resolve the long term liability issues of the protection of water resources.

4-5 On page 3.2-7, under the heading Pit Lake Development, the first sentence in the second paragraph indicates a small pit lake is predicted to form in the Minnie Pit. Later in the paragraph the last sentence indicates it is unlikely that ground water would accumulate in the Minnie Pit in the future. These two sentences seem to contradict each other. This seeming contradiction is also presented on page 3.2-77 in the fourth paragraph down. Will a pit lake form or not?

4-6 On page 3.2-86 and on page 3.3-20, in Section 3.3.4, Monitoring and Mitigation, the document again references the grazing management plan. We reiterate that grazing on this site may not be the best post mine land use because of the importance of the vegetation in protecting the ground water resources of the State of Nevada.

4-7 On page 3.3-20, in Section 3.3.4, Monitoring and Mitigation, the third paragraph indicates BMG will develop the grazing /land management plan over the short term. Why only in the short term? What is going to be the plan for the long term?

4-8 In the same paragraph the document indicated the grazing management plan would account for both livestock and wildlife grazing at proper intensities. The Division of Wildlife has the responsibility to manage wildlife resources within the state. We will welcome any monitoring information from the federal land management agencies which will our agency to better manage wildlife resources. If there is an issue of wildlife use creating problems in the this range, we would be interested in evaluating this matter and developing management options to resolve the problem.

4-9 On page 3.4-11, under the heading Plant Communities/Associations, in the first full paragraph on the page, the document indicates additional perimeter fencing to preclude livestock, wildlife and human trespass will be constructed. Fencing to adequately preclude wildlife will need to be eight feet tall and a mesh of two inches or less over the bottom two feet. Is it the intent of BMG to construct this type of fence? If not, then the text should reflect exactly what BMG proposes for perimeter fencing.

4-10 On page 3.4-11, under the heading Jurisdictional Delineations(Wetlands/Waters of the United States), the first paragraph indicates it is assumed that Willow Creek in the vicinity of the potential impact supports riparian vegetation. We would think it would be easy to determine if indeed Willow Creek does support riparian vegetation in this area. We believe it does and there is no assumption needed. The document can be more accurate displaying this information.

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4-5 Ground water flow modeling (Baker Consultants Inc. 2000a) predicted that a shallow pit lake would form in the Minnie Pit under the No Action alternative, but subsequent developments have made this less likely. Additional exploration drilling was conducted in the vicinity of the Minnie Pit in 1999, and the shallow pond observed in the pit in late 1999 disappeared in early 2000. The drilling may have provided conduits to drain the saturated zone feeding the pit, and it is now unlikely that the pit will again contain standing water. Mitigation measure WR-7 (Section 3.2.4) addresses the uncertainty regarding water in the Minnie Pit. Mitigation measure WR-7 states that if water is observed in the Minnie Pit prior to pit backfill, waste rock added to the base of the pit would be amended with neutralizing material, as would be done with Phoenix Pit backfill.

4-6 Please see the response to comment 4-4. In addition, limited and carefully controlled grazing and browsing are considered beneficial to the long-term health of perennial vegetation communities.

4-7 The plan is to be developed in the short-term, but it is designed to address long-term issues.

4-8 Comment noted. Please note that the perimeter fencing is described in Section 2.4.21.1 of the EIS in the subsection entitled "Fencing."

4-9 The text has been revised in the Final EIS to remove a reference to wildlife fencing and to indicate the fence would "discourage" livestock and human trespass.

4-10 The text has been revised in response to this comment.

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- 4-11 [On page 3.5-1, in Section 3.5.1, Affected Environment, the last paragraph in the first column states that the Willow Creek reservoirs are the only aquatic habitats that support any fisheries. This is not an accurate statement. Willow Creek both above and below the reservoirs supports fish species.
- 4-12 [Finally we noted a few edit items in the review. On page 2-27, in Section 2.4.9, Metals Recovery, in the first sentence the word "would" should be removed from the first sentence.
- 4-13 [On page 3.5-16, in Section 3.5.3, Cumulative Impacts, in the third full paragraph the document states "Under the Proposed Action, disturbance.... for a combined total of 7,073 acres of 50 percent of the cumulative effects area. We believe this should be 5 percent and not 50 percent.

If you have any questions concerning this input, please contact me in Elko.

Sincerely,



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Biologist III
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Elko, NV 89801
(775) 738-5332

RL:rl

cc: Habitat Bureau
Battle Mountain Field Office
Elko Field Office
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- 4-11 The description of the aquatic habitat in Section 3.5.1 of the Final EIS has been revised to reflect existing fisheries in Willow Creek above and below the Willow Creek reservoirs.
- 4-12 The referenced text has been corrected as noted.
- 4-13 The referenced text has been corrected as noted.